1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

than they really are; they would be frightened of spoiling or losing them, though girls might try on the clothes and jewels of a friend for a moment just to see how they look. The only occasion on which clothes are borrowed is in the case of emergencies, for example if a person gets very wet far from his own home. Sometimes, it is said, a girl will dress up in men's clothes as a joke, but it would be considered rather shameful for a grown man to dress up as a woman, though young boys occasionally do so in play. One or two lamas told me that men were essentially superior to women, but I never heard similar opinions from a layman. Various details suggest that there is a sentiment of sex-rivalry, but it only seems to be openly formulated through contact with Nepali or Tibetans. In specifically Lepcha contexts this rivalry is unformulated and unstressed.

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viii

The ideal life of a Lepcha could be schematically represented by a slightly undulating curve, at first rising steeply, and then gradually flattening out, but still rising somewhat till the very end, when there is a tendency to drop again. The first years of life are a period of relative obscurity; a young child consumes more than he gives, and is therefore a weight on his parents and the community. Children are not on the whole harshly treated, but once they have achieved physical independence very little attention is paid to them. Grown-ups do not talk to or play with children; except when they are by themselves children are in the background to do simple chores and to be taught to equip themselves for adult life; they are a responsibility, not companions. There are no organised games for children, and no instruments which are intended to be children's toys; nor for that matter are there any games for adults. A few Lepchas know of the Nepali game of 'Cows and Tigers' (an elaborate form of the game of which the European 'Fox and Geese' is another representative) but they do not play it and do not understand why other people should do so.

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After about the age of ten a boy takes an increasing share in the productive work of the community and, as he grows up, is co-opted more and more into the communal life. There is no abrupt transition for the male between childhood and manhood; a youth takes on additional responsibility and work, and mingles more in the pastimes and discussions of his elders, according to his ability and private inclinations. Sexual experiment and adventure, marriage

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1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

88 Sexual experiment And adventure / marriage
[882] and children follow in due course, but the Lepcha man is still growing
885 up till about the age of thirty-six. At that period his responsibilities are liable to be heaviest; his parents will be retiring from the management of affairs, and he will have, if he is lucky, a number of young children to look after. As his sons grow up and become
888 capable adults in their turn he is able to withdraw somewhat from work; if he is intelligent he is a *yeum-bu*—a man who knows—and as such will be often asked for his advice by the Mandal and by his juniors. If he retains his health and prosperity as he grows older, and if his children and grand-children are still alive he acquires a sort of talismanic virtue; younger men will take valuable presents to so fortunate an old man in order to get in return either his drinking cup or his rosary and to share a meal of rice with him, in order to acquire the desirable qualities of this prosperous great-grandfather. But if an old man survives his children and loses his capacity to work his position is an unenviable one; he too, like the young child, consumes more than he produces; he is a nuisance, not respected or listened to, treated at best with casual deference. For the Lepchas the normal span of life is four score years; until that age a man or woman should be capable of doing sufficient work to keep himself; those that survive longer are a misery to themselves and everybody else.

885 With one extremely important exception the curve of a woman's life follows that of the man's. Except for the accident of death there are no breaks or sudden transitions in a man's life; for the majority of women there is the geographical transfer to her husband's home; although the marriage customs soften this as much as possible it represents a psychological change for a woman which has no parallel in the life of a man. It is probably for this reason that young married women appear so much more self-possessed and grown-up than their husbands. A man who stays in his own community is perpetually classified as weaker, or younger, or stupider than his elders or contemporaries; a woman in a new village is free from such comparisons and takes her place according to her own merits and abilities. A woman of twenty takes her full rôle in the group of adult women; a man of thirty is still somewhat bashful and is inclined to hide behind the knowledge and experience of his elders.

88 The undulations on the curve of Lepcha life are the alternations of plenty and scarcity, of feasting and everyday life. There is no absolute contrast between plenty and scarcity, between a feast and an ordinary meal; it is a question of quantity rather than quality.